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SUBJECT: MAJOR PARTIES' PRIMARIES JUDGED FREE AND FAIR, THOUGH  
RESERVATION OF MOST IMPORTANT CANDIDACIES UNDERCUTS INTERNAL PARTY  
DEMOCRACY

SUMMARY

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¶1. (SBU) The ruling Dominican Liberation Party (PLD) and opposition Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD), in late November/early December, held primary elections for a majority of their candidacies in the 05/16/10 congressional/municipal elections. The Central Electoral Board (JCE), the independent government agency responsible for overseeing electoral activities, judged the respective primaries to have been generally free and fair, with a few notable exceptions. While over a hundred losing candidates earned headlines with complaints of fraud or other irregularities, only a handful are likely to be found to have merit. Both the PLD and the PRD have reserved substantial numbers of candidacies for selection by the parties' leaderships (up to 30 percent, with another 15 percent set aside for alliance partners). A lower court recently found the practice of reserving candidacies unconstitutional, but this decision almost certainly will be reversed on appeal. While the primaries themselves represent a step forward for the electoral process in the Dominican Republic, the reservation of the most important candidacies by the PLD's and PRD's leaderships emphasizes the continued limitations on internal party democracy here. END SUMMARY.

RELATIVELY SMOOTH PRIMARIES

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¶2. (SBU) The PLD and PRD agreed to stagger their primaries on four separate weekends during late November/early December, although the PRD had to use an additional weekend when logistical difficulties prevented primaries from going forward as scheduled in a couple of rural provinces. JCE Administrative Chamber President Roberto Rosario, in a 12/22/09 meeting with Charge, A/DCM and Pol-Econ Counselor, explained that both parties sought and received substantial technical assistance from the JCE in organizing and carrying out their respective primaries.

¶3. (SBU) Rosario, along with fellow JCE members Jose Aquino and Cesar Felix, as well as JCE General Administrator of Information

Miguel Garcia and JCE National Director of Elections Joel Lantigua, characterized the primaries as generally free and fair. They noted that while the media highlighted approximately 200 allegations of fraud and other irregularities, the total number of complaints amounted to less than half of one percent of the candidates involved. The JCE officials predicted that only a handful of these challenges are likely to prosper. They also commented that the primaries were a major improvement over the primaries held in advance of the 2006 congressional/municipal elections, which they said were much more problematic, particularly that of the PRD.

#### THE PARTIES' MACHINES MAINTAIN CONTROL

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¶4. (U) The two major parties each publicized their efforts to "purify" their list of primary candidates to ensure that individuals with criminal records or alleged links to narcotrafficking were excluded: the PLD disqualified 22 pre-candidates, while the PRD rejected over 70. They also adopted measures, in conformance with their party statutes, to reserve a substantial number of candidacies to be selected by the parties' leaderships. The PLD, for example, is reserving all 26 of the senate seats it holds along with its Social Christian Reformist Party (PRSC) alliance partner, leaving just six nominations to be

contested. In addition, the PLD has reserved 51 of 178 national deputy slots, 51 mayoral candidacies and 229 city council positions. The PRD, for its part, has reserved 30 percent of its candidacies. Both parties are also reserving 15 percent of their candidacies for future alliance partners.

¶5. (U) The PLD and PRD leaderships responded to the publicity afforded disgruntled losing candidates by threatening disciplinary measures against those who continued to air their complaints outside party channels. PLD Secretary General (and Senate President) Reinaldo Pared vowed to expel party members who "propagated disorder," while PLD Election Committee Chairwoman Alejandrina German stated that the party was considering expelling four officials responsible for major balloting irregularities, including Peravia Governor Bienvenido Montero, who allegedly removed 30 ballot boxes from voting locations when it became clear that his favored candidates were not prospering. PRD Election Committee Chairman Hugo Tolentino also threatened "intransigent" party members with expulsion, but later offered to welcome defectors back to the fold if they repented their ways.

#### MIXED RESULTS FOR WOMEN

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¶6. (SBU) By law, at least one-third of each party's nominees must be women. In the PLD, only 27 women won nomination for national deputy as opposed to 86 men, while only eight women won mayoral candidacies as compared to 81 men. According to the JCE's Rosario, however, the practice is for parties to run candidates of different genders for mayor and deputy mayor, thus, if a man wins the nomination for mayor, a woman will get the nod as the candidate for deputy mayor. Rosario added that the JCE will not register a party's candidates unless that party complies with the minimum quota of female candidates. Consequently, he explained, the parties may find that they will need to appoint women as many of their reserved candidacies.

## A CONSTITUTIONAL OBSTACLE?

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17. (SBU) A lower court judge in Elias Pina Province, on 12/21/09, issued a ruling annulling the PRD's reservation of the senatorial candidacy there, and ordered the party to register the pre-candidacy of one Plinio D'oleo Moreta and to hold a primary election to select its senatorial nominee. The judge held that the PRD's reservation of this candidacy violated D'Oleo's constitutional "right to be electable." JCE member Aquino opined that this ruling would be quickly reversed on appeal, as the constitutional "right to be electable" is modified by the phrase "in conformance with the law," and the law permits parties to reserve candidacies.

## OFFICIAL NOMINATION OF CANDIDATES IN JAN/FEB

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18. (U) Although political parties have until 03/17/10 to register their candidates with the JCE for the May elections, both the PLD and PRD plan to do so by early February at the latest, in order to commence their campaigns. PRD President Miguel Vargas Maldonado has stated that his party will announce its official list of

nominees on 01/17/10, and that he will travel nationwide to lobby voters for the party's full slate. The PLD has yet to set a date, with Secretary General Pared predicting that it will be soon after 01/26/10, so as not to conflict with the proclamation of the revised constitution on that date, and so as to give the PLD sufficient time to reach a full agreement with the PRSC and other smaller allied parties on incorporating their candidates into its list of nominees.

## COMMENT

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19. (SBU) The primary process was both a plus and a minus for Dominican democracy. On the positive ledger, the voting was mostly peaceful and the tabulation of votes apparently mostly fair. On the downside, the leadership of both major parties, through their reservation of the most important congressional and municipal candidacies, limited the exercise of internal party democracy and ensured that they would maintain their strangleholds over their respective political organizations. END COMMENT.  
Lambert